

Dr Graham Mitchell (1948-2017):

A Side-Line Supporter of Clinical Parapsychology

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Due to the recent passing of my mentor – and friend – Dr Graham Mitchell, I feel compelled to enlighten readers of *JEEP* with the support Dr Mitchell gave to exploration within clinical parapsychology. Although not a parapsychologist himself, in the last five years he ignited new ideas for overlaps within positive psychology, health care, and parapsychology, working closely with Rachel Evenden, Prof Chris Roe, and myself, in the formation of this research before his untimely death.

Graham Mitchell gained a bachelor's of education from the University of Birmingham in 1971, and became a chartered biologist in 1981. During the early 1980s, in association with the Brain and Behaviour Group, he read for his PhD with the Open University and completed in 1984. He later completed a bridging course, by studying for a diploma in psychology (social and cognitive psychology) again with the Open University, which gained him recognition and membership to the British Psychological Society in 1998. In 2012, he became a fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine. He joined the University of Northampton as a lecturer in 1999, and from 2004 onwards, he was the subject leader for psychology.

His research interests typically fell into the areas of education, biological and cognitive psychology, and primarily, positive psychology. Among the number of research interests he listed, projects Dr Mitchell was involved in included: 'resilience associated with stressful experiences, cognitive styles, learned helplessness and depression', 'self-beliefs and its effects on academic achievement and health' (see Mitchell, 2002, 2008) and one of the most relevant to his involvement in clinical parapsychology was 'the role of hope in achievement and recovery'. With his own association within the Christian church and its teachings (he was a Pastor of Grace Communion International), Dr Mitchell was highly interested in the human traits of beliefs and hope, how they work, and the varying impacts they have on people in various situations. Certainly the Churches Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies and the Academy for Religion and Psychical Research have published on these overlaps (e.g. Badham, 1993, Habgood, 1989, Rose, 1999), but for more general literature on positive psychology developing from theology and philosophy, I'd direct readers to the works of Hume (1739), Taylor (1946), Marcel (1951), Lynch (1965), Snyder (1994), Kaplan and Schwartz, (2008), and Plante (2012). These are but a few relevant works that demonstrate strong links between the interests of Dr Mitchell and myself, regarding human coping and development following times of personal hardship, which could include anomalous experiences being reported, or concepts of survival beyond death being discussed in relation to hope.

When I returned to the University of Northampton in 2012 to read for a PhD in psychology (see Cooper, 2017), I wanted to incorporate one of my key interests in parapsychology (that being the experience of apparitions) to the psychology of 'motivation and emotion' – an

undergraduate module I'd thoroughly enjoyed in my early studies. I approached Dr Mitchell on this matter who summed up our entire conversation by saying "look at hope." Sifting through the literature regarding apparitions and 'sense of presence' experiences, my readings brought me repeatedly to issues of personal loss and bereavement, in which many popular works cited 'hope as a healer' following anomalous experiences of the bereft (e.g. Devers, 1997; LaGrand, 1999). And so a PhD project was born in which I began to read and collect data in order to understand the place and purpose of hope as a cognitive mechanism, following anomalous experiences associated with death and loss.

During this time, Dr Mitchell took on a master's student of integrative counselling. His interests in parapsychology through supervising me – alongside my other supervisor Prof Roe – had clearly grown, as I noticed through our frequent discussions on anomalous phenomena surrounding death. Rachel Evenden's master's dissertation was to focus on her personal interests in spirituality and overlaps with counselling, and personal psychological growth. Between them, a dissertation was developed in which Ms Evenden was to explore the impact of mediumship as an alternative to bereavement counselling, on those who sought personal readings following a significant loss. I was brought in on this project as an advisor, and again, got to discuss parapsychology in greater depth with Dr Mitchell, this time with regards to mediumship. Again the dissertation topic focused on the clinical implications of the parapsychological phenomena at hand, and not the ontology of mediumship.

JEOP had just seen the publication of its first issue by this point. Given the journal's interests in more clinical matters surrounding anomalous experiences and/or the first person perspective, I suggested to the research team that the dissertation would do well being written up for publication. This was strongly praised by Dr Mitchell, and so Ms Evenden and I set about editing and re-writing the dissertation down to a suitable size for publication purposes. Thus, one of *JEOP*'s first and only publications surrounding clinical parapsychology to include Dr Mitchell was presented (Evenden, Cooper & Mitchell, 2013).

Half way through my PhD, Dr Mitchell had a life changing accident which resulted in paralysis. Even so, it was clear that he was still motivated as to the continued workings of the psychology department with many members of staff regularly visiting him, especially Ms Evenden. On one of my visits to him, I took abstracts and publications we had achieved during the PhD process such as a book chapter (Cooper, Roe & Mitchell, 2015), which is increasingly gaining in popularity as an overview of the topic of 'anomalous experiences and the bereavement process' since its publication. I also took conference presentation abstracts which achieved thanks and praise from those in the audience who could relate to the experiences through their own losses (see Cooper, Roe & Mitchell, 2015a,b).

Dr Mitchell frequently told students that when he asked prospective students why they wanted to study psychology, he said the most common reply was "because I want to help people". Though many people might not be able to see the benefits initially of parapsychology, they have clearly shown through with the work we were doing on the bereaved. Just acknowledging anomalous experiences alone within the bereavement process and taking them seriously, was leading to audience members and readers of the work getting

in touch and thanking us for doing this kind of research. It leads to reassurance, and comfort, in that people are not alone in these experiences and they are in fact quite common.

Following Dr Mitchell's interests positive psychology allowed me to find links and merge it with parapsychology, so much so that I was invited to Bucks New University to talk about our research and write an extended essay on the overlaps between positive psychology and parapsychology (Cooper, 2016). Without Dr Mitchell's inspiration and enthusiasm for positive psychology, and personal encouragement for finding overlaps to parapsychology, my journey would have been very different. Indeed, if things had of been different for Dr Mitchell, he might have still been around working closely on these projects and offering so much more to clinical parapsychology. Sadly, he passed away 2nd July, 2017.

His involvement as a 'side-line' supporter of clinical parapsychology will live on through the work we carried out at the University of Northampton. Prof Roe and myself have several more publications to work on regarding anomalous experiences, bereavement and recovery, which carry Dr Mitchell's name, wisdom, and inspiration, thanks to his teachings.

If you do not hope,

You will not find what lies beyond your hopes.

- Clement of Alexandria

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